

HIV/AIDS in Russia

A USAID Brief

Russia's HIV/AIDS epidemic has spread rapidly since 1996, jumping from region to region and city to city. By 1999, the epidemic had exploded among injecting drug users in 13 regions. The pool of HIV infection among injecting drug users—a population estimated at 3 million nationwide—is now large enough to pose a serious risk to the general population. In 1999, 90 percent of newly registered HIV cases occurred among injecting drug users.

As of April 2002, Russia reported a cumulative total of 190,000 cases of HIV infection, but Russian health authorities estimate that the actual number of HIV-infected people may be 2 to 2.5 times higher. At the end of 2001, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimated that 700,000 Russian adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS, with an adult prevalence of 0.9 percent. The Russian Federal AIDS Center reports a 2002 prevalence of 0.7 percent.

Median HIV prevalence among women attending antenatal clinics outside major urban areas was 0.005 percent in 1998, while median prevalence for male patients attending sexually transmitted infection (STI) clinics in major urban areas was .02 percent. An estimated 422 Russians had died due to AIDS by 2001.

Kaliningrad, in northwestern Russia, was the first region to experience a widespread outbreak of HIV among injecting drug users, and has been hit particularly hard, with 2,681 cases of HIV reported as of November 2000. According to the Russian Ministry of Health, injecting drug users have accounted for more than 50 percent of all recorded HIV infections since 1987.

NATIONAL RESPONSE

Between 1993-95, Russia developed a national AIDS program implemented by the Ministry of Health, with collaboration from federal, territorial, and regional AIDS centers. Due to economic constraints, no federal funds were allocated to the program in 1996-97, and funding did not resume until late 1998. In 2002, the third Federal program was adopted for 2002-2006, with an estimated budget of \$6 million for 2002.

In 1995, Russia enacted a Federal HIV/AIDS Law to set forth guidelines for HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support.



Map of Russia: PCL Map Collection, University of Texas

Outreach education about the dangers of homemade drug preparation and other harm reduction messages (e.g., “Don’t share needles”) have assisted in reducing risky behaviors among injecting drug users, although in some areas there are few outreach activities, and overall funding is limited. Campaigns such as needle exchange programs are less common, and the law impedes this type of effort.

USAID SUPPORT

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated \$4.24 million to Russia’s HIV/AIDS activities in FY 2001, up from \$1.7 million in FY 1999.

In March 1998, the United States and Russia began collaborating to control the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) after a visit by high-ranking AIDS experts from Russia to the United States. USAID, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Population Services International (PSI)/AIDSMARK worked with the Russian Ministry of Health to develop a multi-year strategy (1998-2000) aimed at HIV prevention among high-risk groups.

In March 2000, an assessment team reviewed the original strategy, assessed progress, and proposed a follow-on strategy for 2001-2003. Both the original and future strategies incorporate strengths of government and nongovernmental sectors to improve

service delivery and public information capacity to reach vulnerable populations. Recommendations from the Ministry of Health and an analysis of HIV/AIDS rates led to the selection of Moscow City and Saratov Oblast as project demonstration sites. Additional funding in FY2001 led to expansion of some components of the program to Samara Oblast.

A revised USAID HIV/AIDS strategy for 2002-2005 is under development, but will continue to focus on youth, nongovernmental organization (NGO) capacity building, and replication of USAID programs across Russia.

USAID supports the following country programs:

Behavior change communication

USAID supports an awareness campaign for HIV/AIDS and STIs, targeting the general population and youth through the use of radio, television, leaflets, brochures, posters, concerts, and youth/sports activities.

Capacity building

Through the Baltic Sea Region Initiative, USAID supports governments, local authorities, and NGOs in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad to increase coverage and effectiveness of national and local responses to HIV among young people, injecting drug users, and other vulnerable groups. A related “Network of Excellence” project aims to strengthen activities carried out by the Kaliningrad AIDS Center, through

Estimated Number of Adults and Children Living with HIV/AIDS (end 2001)	700,000
Total Population (2001)	144.6 million
Adult HIV prevalence (end 2001)	0.9%
HIV-1 Seroprevalence in Urban Areas	
Population at High Risk (i.e., sex workers and clients, STI patients, or others with known risk factors)	15.3%
Population at Low Risk (i.e., pregnant women, blood donors, or others with no known risk factors)	N/A

Sources: UNAIDS, U.S. Census Bureau

support for professional training workshops and provision of information technology equipment.

USAID has also supported the development of three partnerships between Russian and American HIV/AIDS NGOs. The partnerships have developed prevention strategies for vulnerable groups and have strengthened the capacity of the Russian partners to design and implement HIV prevention programs. This model has since been expanded to develop two Russian-to-Russian NGO partnerships.

Sexually transmitted infection control

USAID is working with CDC and Russian STI and HIV/AIDS specialists to sponsor training workshops and national conferences focusing on interventions for high-risk groups. Services for vulnerable groups will be improved through surveys, upgrades to laboratory equipment, training, and introduction of new methods for STI diagnosis and treatment guidelines.

- Gaps in knowledge about patterns of drug use and sexual behavior among high-risk populations, especially out-of-school youth, impede prevention efforts.

CHALLENGES

According to the Baltic Sea Initiative—launched by USAID, UNAIDS, and the government of Finland to address growing HIV prevalence in the Baltic countries and in Russia—Russia faces several challenges in responding to its growing HIV/AIDS epidemic:

- HIV/AIDS is perceived primarily as a medical problem and has not yet been given appropriate multisectoral attention and support.
- Vertical health care structures constitute obstacles for HIV/STI prevention and care.
- HIV/AIDS interventions are often implemented in isolation, and information and lessons learned are not widely disseminated.
- There is little coordination among NGOs working in HIV/AIDS.
- As a result of the ongoing economic crisis, budgets for health and social services programs have been cut; HIV/AIDS programs are underfunded and understaffed.

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Please direct comments on this profile to: info@synergyaids.com.

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